

STANDISH ROAD NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT (SRNCD)
STUDY COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2015, 3:30 P.M.
TOWN HALL – GREAT ROOM

MINUTES

Study Committee present: Naomi Cameron, Catherine Johnson, Gerry Murphy, Helen Robertson, Michael Scholl

Also present: Jan Albrecht, Jaclyn Harris, Ann Doyle, Rebecca Liley-Wagner

1. Call to Order

Ms. Johnson called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m.

2. Consideration of Minutes

The minutes from the March 5 meeting were approved by unanimous vote.

3. New and Other Business

Update on Public Information Session & Info Sheets:

The Committee discussed the plans for a public information session. Although the original intent was to have this in March, scheduling in the weeks before Annual Town Meeting has been difficult. There was agreement that it will take place after the Easter/Passover weekend, avoiding April school vacation and giving as much notice to the neighborhood as possible so that many can attend.

Notice of the public meeting will be hand-delivered to neighborhood residents. This notice will be accompanied by information on the importance of Royal Barry Wills to the neighborhood (“Did You Know?”) and by data on sales within the Denton Road NCD since its inception and within the Cottage Street Historic District since it was created in 1981.

The Royal Barry Wills information has been posted to the Standish Road NCD website; the home sales data will be posted when the accompanying text has been written.

Members of the Committee noted that the data, compiled from Sold Statistics within the Multiple Listing Service seems to demonstrate that the Denton Road NCD sales had shorter than the median days on market and above the median selling price to list price percentages when compared to sales in Wellesley of houses built prior to 2000. There is similar data for the Cottage Street Historic District. It was noted that the Denton Road sales are few and might be considered statistically insignificant, but that the Cottage Street data provides a much greater number of sales over a longer period of time and represents a district where the restrictions for change are

greater than for an NCD. It was further noted by the Committee that the benefit applies to properties on Denton Road whether they opted in or opted out and that opt-in/opt out information becomes public information that is available on the Wellesley Assessor's Office field cards.

Review of Committee Decisions:

In order to get early Study Committee discussions available to the public, Ms. Johnson stated that the Study Committee was named January 20. It met twice (January 22 and February 7) before anyone realized that it was an official Town committee that needed open meetings, posted minutes and other required procedures. Ms. Johnson said that a casual conversation with the Town Clerk on February 13 alerted her to this situation and that the Clerk also asked her to request that Tad Heuer, Chair of the Historical Commission, send her the list of Committee members so that she could send letters of appointment.

Catherine Johnson was named Chair at the January 20 meeting; the Committee reaffirmed that at today's meeting.

Also, information was sent to all residents of the original proposed NCD area by email and/or hand delivery, written by Ms. Johnson on behalf of the Committee. The document included four bullet points outlining the process for review of proposed construction as well as contact information for the Study Committee. Its purpose was to solicit feedback, not to ask neighbors to opt-in to the NCD at that time. The committee voted in favor of this information and to attach it to today's minutes, for posting. (*Chair's note:* The cover letter/email and Review Process information follow at the end of these minutes.)

Ms. Johnson also suggested that it would be helpful to have a Vice-Chair, something that should have been done at that first gathering, given the complexity of the Committee's work and the procedures surrounding it. Helen Robertson was unanimously selected as Vice-Chair.

Continued Discussion/Editing:

The early draft of the guideline section is a pared down version of the Denton Road guidelines, eliminating oversight of things like landscaping and fences, which are exempt. There was discussion of the four items that trigger review: total teardown/new construction, 30% partial teardown/new construction, significant additions (50%/1000 square feet) to an existing house and changes that result in an increased ridge height. The Committee noted that, as distinct from Town Zoning Bylaws that rely on specific numbers like house side and height, the NCD guidelines will address less the tangible attributes of scale, mass and how proposed construction fits with the existing streetscape, taking topography into account.

There was discussion that actual Commission, once established, could offer early input on how to reduce mass, similar to how the Design Review Board gives input during Large House Review. The guidelines written as part of the Study Report,

must offer consistent definitions of square footage that are publically available as compared to TLAG (Total Living Area + Garage) that is provided as part of the building permit process and then Realtor/Owner calculations of the finished space within the house. Members of the Committee agreed that that it would be helpful for residents to know what the minimum requirements for submission to the Commission would be.

It also was agreed that the goal for the NCD guidelines would be consistency, not rigidity.

To foster more understanding for the community and the public who was in attendance, the Committee explained that the NCD Commission members are appointed by the Historical Commission and that the process becomes self-selecting. People interested in serving apply, are interviewed by the Historical Commission, and then are appointed. There are five members and two alternates, serving a two-year term. Increasing that number would require a Town Meeting vote to change Bylaw 46A.

The Committee decided to continue work on the Guidelines at future meetings.

Schedule Next Study Committee Meeting

The next meeting will be scheduled for March 23, late afternoon.

4. Public Comments:

There was a request for a neutral moderator at the public information sessions so that those with reservations or unfavorable opinions about the NCD could be heard.

There was a concern that there had been a lack of clarity about what people signed, whether signing to have a Study Committee or whether it was a commitment to form the NCD.

There was a concern that if the guidelines are too oblique, residents won't know what they are signing for.

There was a request to expand the panel at the information session to include those people who might not be in favor (either neutral or opposed) of an NCD.

There was concern expressed that the term Neighborhood Conservation District leads to confusion about why the "district" excludes a significant part of what is a cohesive neighborhood.

There was clarification by the Study Committee that the term "Neighborhood Conservation District" might be a confusing moniker, that "neighborhood" was an imperfectly defined area that is amorphous in size and shape and "district" is nothing more than a construct – political or otherwise – that can overlay a neighborhood. However, NCD was the term picked over thirty years ago when the

process evolved at the State level. The Committee also reminded the public that it has a year to complete the study, unless its work is extended by the Historical Commission for a second year. Following the completion of the report, there would be a joint Historical Commission/Planning Board public hearing, with a minimum of two weeks notice with adequate time for public input. Ms. Johnson said that she would recuse herself from voting after that hearing because she is a member of the Planning Board and Chair of this Committee.

5. The meeting was adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

(Chair's note: revisions are underscored.)